

RUSSIA AND THE WEST IN IRAN

Tabriz separatists and, by one bold stroke, secure Iran's Caspian provinces for the Soviet Republic. Consequently the Bolshevik forces operating in Gilan turned toward the town of Zanzan, ready to invade Iranian Azerbaijan. At that moment, however, to the disappointment of Soviet leaders, the Azerbaijan separatists did not prove co-operative. The National Democrats in Tabriz, instead of joining hands with the Bolsheviks, declared that they disapproved of Soviet landings at Enzeli and, in a sudden upsurge of patriotism, denounced the pact that had been concluded between the Russians and Kuchik Khan. Toward the end of July a dramatic episode almost brought the Soviet troops into the Iranian Azerbaijan: the remnants of the first Tatar Regiment of the free Republic of Azerbaijan crossed the border of Iranian Azerbaijan to find refuge from the Bolsheviks. The regiment had been stationed in the south of the Republic when Soviet rule was set up in Baku in April, 1920, and eventually accepted the change of regime. Soviet atrocities, however, perpetrated on the Tatar population of Elizabethpol caused the regiment to revolt and to wage hopeless warfare against the numerically superior Bolshevik forces sent from Baku. Eventually the regiment crossed the Aras River and found shelter in Iran. Its commander, Colonel Sofiev, became the guest of the Kurdish Khan of Maku, a chieftain wielding uncontested influence over his district. The Soviet troops did not pursue the Tatars any farther. The "Azadistan" experiment was, in any case, nearing its end, and stronger contingents of the Iranian government's forces arrived on the scene. Governor of Azerbaijan Mokhbar as-Saltaneh, freshly appointed to that post by

the new cabinet of Moshir ed-Dowleh, started energetic negotiations with the rebels, soon to be followed by military action. By the middle of September the Iranian Cossack Brigade dispersed the National Democrat forces. Khiaban himself was killed on the fourteenth of that month. The restoration of order and authority by the central government prevented any further direct action by Soviet forces, unless the Soviet government was resolved to repeat the Gilan experiment in Azerbaijan. This was not, however, the case. Instead of direct action, Moscow preferred to play on the local nationalist feelings of the Turko-Tatar Azerbaijani population, exploiting any manifestation of discontent against the central government. Strangely enough these